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In this Rattling the Cages panel talk, Eric King speaks with former political prisoners and George Jackson Brigade members Janine Bertram and Mark Cook. Perhaps the most prolific of the revolutionary groups in the Pacific Northwest, the George Jackson Brigade described itself as, "We are cozy cuddly / armed and dangerous / and we will / raze the fucking prisons / to the ground."

FIRESTORM

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RATTLING THE CAGES

ORAL HISTORIES OF NORTH AMERICAN POLITICAL PRISONERS

"Looking Back at the George Jackson Brigade"

MARK COOK | JANINE BERTRAM | ERIC KING

Originally hosted as a live conversation by Firestorm Books, recording available on Firestorm's youtube channel.
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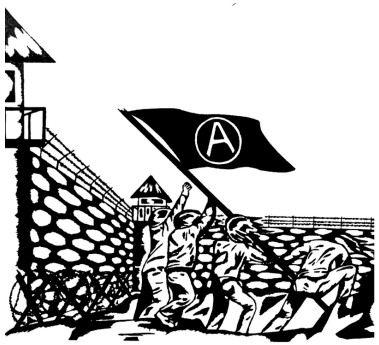
Published by AK Press, *Rattling the Cages: Oral Histories of North American Political Prisoners* is a project of abolitionists Josh Davidson and Eric King. The book is filled with the experience and wisdom of over thirty current and former North American political prisoners. It provides first-hand details of prison life and the political commitments that continue to lead prisoners into direct confrontation with state authorities and institutions.

Transcription, editing, and formatting by ev, Danielle, Josh, & Jeremy with help from Firestorm Books.

all labor volunteered

with whatever weapons at hand



Janine Bertram was active in Seattle-area queer and leftist communities in the 1960s and 70s. She co-founded the Seattle chapter of COYOTE (Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics) and worked to collectivize the group. Janine was a member of the George Jackson Brigade (GJB) and spent over four years in prison for political work. The majority of her imprisonment was at FCI Pleasanton. In prison she helped found the first U.S. prison parenting program (Prison MATCH) and made it a collective with women of all races actively participating. She also held small study groups reading and discussing George Jackson's work. Janine was heavily involved in the Disability Rights movement and helped pass the ADA. Her activism in Disability Justice and Rights continues to this day.

Mark Cook co-founded the first prison chapter of the Black Panther Party at Walla Walla State Penitentiary in Washington and worked tirelessly on behalf of prisoners' rights. Mark was a member of the George Jackson Brigade (GJB) in the Pacific Northwest during the 1970s. He spent four decades behind bars, more than half of which was for his political work. The majority of his imprisonment was in federal facilities, namely Leavenworth, Lompoc, and Lewisburg, and Walla Walla. Now in his late 80s, Mark continues to be active and involved in movement work.

Eric King is a father, poet, author, and activist. In December 2023 he was released from the supermax ADX prison after spending nearly ten years as a political prisoner for an act of protest over the police murder of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. He was held in solitary confinement for years and was met with violence by guards throughout his incarceration. Eric has published three zines: *Battle Tested* (2015), *Antifa in Prison* (2019), and *Pacing in My Cell* (2019). His sentencing statement is included in the book *Defiance: Anarchist Statements Before Judge and Jury* (2019). Eric now works as a paralegal for the Bread and Roses Legal Center.

Libertie Valance: I'm going to go ahead and get us started here because I don't want to waste any more time not hearing from our guests. So, welcome everyone, thanks so much for joining. My name is Libertie and I'm a member of the Firestorm Collective. We're excited to be hosting *Rattling the Cages* co-creator Eric King in conversation with former political prisoners and George Jackson Brigade members Janine Bertram and Mark Cook.

Just a little background, Firestorm Books, where I'm hosting from, is a 16-year-old radical bookstore owned and operated by a queer feminist collective in southern Appalachia on the land of the Cherokee People. I want to give a little bit of background information on our speakers today, too.

First up, Janine Bertram was active in Seattle-area queer and leftist communities in the 1960s and 70s, she co-founded the Seattle chapter of COYOTE, which is Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics (I hope we hear a little more about that) and work to collectivize the group. Janine was a member of the George Jackson Brigade and spent over four years in prison for political work. The majority of her imprisonment was at FCI Pleasanton. In prison she helped to found the first US prison parenting program and made it a collective with women of all races participating. She also held small study groups reading and discussing George Jackson's work. And Janine was involved in the disability rights movement and helped pass the ADA. Her activism in disability justice and rights continues to this day, and we're so blessed to have you here with us, Janine.

Mark Cook co-founded the first prison chapter of the Black Panther Party at Walla Walla State Penitentiary in Washington and worked tirelessly on behalf of prisoners rights. Mark was a member of the George Jackson Brigade in the Pacific Northwest during the 1970s and spent four decades behind bars, more than half of which was for his political work. The majority of Mark's imprisonment was in federal facilities. Now in his 80s, Mark continues to be active and involved in movement work. Mark, thank you so much for being here with us.

Last but not least, Eric King is a father, poet, author, and activist. In December 2023 he was released from the supermax ADX prison after spending nearly ten years as a political prisoner for an act of protest over the police murder of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. He was held in solitary confinement for years and was met with violence by guards throughout his incarceration. Eric has published three zines: *Battle Tested*, *Antifa in Prison*, and *Pacing in My Cell*. And his sentencing statement is included in the book *Defiance: Anarchist Statements Before Judge and Jury*. Eric now works as a paralegal for the Bread and Roses Legal Center. Eric, thanks for being here and also for making this incredible series happen. Also, as always, I just want to give a shout out to Josh Davidson, the co-editor and co-creator of *Rattling the Cages*, who does so much behind the scenes work to make these happen. So thank you, Josh. On that note it's time to pass it off. I'm really looking forward to this conversation. Eric, I think you can take it away.

Eric King: Awesome. Janine, Mark, thank you so much. We've got a nice little crowd adding up too, so I appreciate that, as well. I want to start with just a brief thing about the George Jackson Brigade and your involvement with it. When I was inside, I received two books about you all and it was just wildly influential to me, so could you both just briefly talk about what the George Jackson Brigade was to you, how you came to join it, and just give us a little rundown of your experience with it? We can start with you, Mark.

Mark Cook: The George Jackson Brigade arose from the name of George Jackson, the field marshal of the Black Panther Party, and it was based mostly on his writings. Myself, I just was a member of the Black Panther Party and I used the 10-point program as my guide for the work I did inside of prison. I started doing prison support work before I joined Brigade and it was based mostly on the fact that prisoners were getting screwed over behind their work, their abilities, in not getting paid for anything. In fact, it was a continuation of slavery, and there's no such thing as nice slavery. You may get a good job inside, but it's still slavery, and we're entitled to have the right to say how much we want to sell our labor for, just like anybody else outside who belongs to a union, or any organized workers. So I carried that over.

As far as when I joined the Brigade, some of the work that they were doing that inspired me was when they did support for the labor movement inside of prison, the prisoners themselves, and of course the most publicized one was the blowing up the Department of Corrections. That was before I joined the Brigade. This was in the state of Washington. The prisoners were being oppressed in solitary confinement, and they wrote

letters to various news media outside trying to get some kind of attention to what was going on, and there's no way they could get the attention. So what the Brigade did was they wrote a memo, a newsletter to the public, saying what was going on. And to get their attention they bombed the Department of Corrections in the capitol. That got everybody's attention, and immediately they got rid of the warden, moved some of the prison guards out, and put people in solitary confinement out of solitary confinement. That really impressed me.

The thing that was solid to the continuation of the work I was doing was when I started CONvention, which had the right to speak as a provision and prisoners' rights as labor inside. Those were the two main things that I started with CONvention.

Janine Bertram: Didn't the Panthers have you check us out or check the Brigade out?

Mark Cook: Well, this was just before I joined the Brigade, and they asked what the Brigade was about, and I told them about that. I told them how they were following through on the second provision of the 10-point program of the Black Panther Party, that everybody should be able to have work. It was just a continuation. I joined it because that's the main things I was doing: the right to vote and the right to have privileges at work.

Eric King: Janine, how about you? What led you there and what were your experiences like?

Janine Bertram: Well, I joined the Brigade later than other people. When I first heard and read about the Brigade I thought they were offending workers, but it turned out there was a huge strike of women's electrical workers, and at that point in time the Brigade did an action at Laurelhurst substation on New Year's Eve, a bombing. In fact, many of the workers loved it. So that electrical bombing, the Seattle City Light bombing, that's why I joined. And because of the workers. We talked to people on the picket line—and this was before I joined the Brigade—and they really appreciated Laurelhurst, so that made me reassess what I felt about armed struggle. And I joined the Brigade after that because I had worked with two Brigade members and had met Mark beforehand in the halfway house. That was something that broadened my consciousness about racism, when they sent you back to prison, just the injustices were huge and I wanted to take action against them.

Eric King: I hope everyone watching and everyone who watches in the future takes note of the fact that they attacked the prison system, and we could use some more diversity of tactics today. So Mark and Janine, could you both tell us briefly what led to—Mark in your case the political prisoner sentence, and then, Janine, for your time in prison—what charges got you landed inside? And Janine, you can start.

Janine Bertram: Eric, actually I don't remember specifically what my charges were. It was a long time ago. I think it was conspiracy to rob banks and explosives.

Eric King: Okay, and how much time did you receive?

Janine Bertram: Ten years.

Eric King: And then you did four of it?

Janine Bertram: Yeah.

Eric King: Okay. And Mark, what about you? What was your political prisoner case?

Mark Cook: Well, the George Jackson Brigade, according to Ed Mead, had robbed a bank and they ended up getting busted. One, Bruce Seidel, was killed, and two others, John Sherman and Ed Mead, were locked up in prison in Seattle and the Brigade decided to help them out. In other words, free both of them. But they had to make a choice: they couldn't do both at the same time. There was an old part of the Brigade that we don't really associate that much with, but when they heard what happened they wanted to come immediately and help get Ed Mead out. But the story was they had to get John out. So I was chosen as one of the people to help pull this whole thing off. Without giving names, we had all the materials we needed, we had a place to put John after we got him out of prison, etcetera. So I confronted the police. John had been shot in the jaw during the bank robbery, and his jaws were wired together so they had to take him to the hospital regularly to have that checked on at King County Hospital, not far from the jail. So we had planned to intervene at the

hospital and tell the officer, "We're taking your prisoner," and leave, just like that. But it didn't quite go off that easy. The guard with him lowered his hand—supposedly after the fact they said he was trying to get to his keys but it looked like he was going for his gun—and so I just pulled the trigger, and the cop dropped. He didn't die, he dropped. It's kind of an exciting thing to hear, but it's a stomach turner at times. It didn't go as smoothly as we thought. He was taken by the other Brigade members off to a safe house, and I returned to my family. I was a single father at the time, I had a kid who was about ten years old at the time.

Eric King: And how much time did you receive for that?

Mark Cook: I did twenty-four years for that in the federal system, and later on about four or five more years in the state system. I was tried by both the state and the feds.

Janine Bertram: And all of the white members of the Brigade who were arrested got out long before Mark.

Mark Cook: Yeah, and that was expected. Before I got involved in it, we said if we ever did get locked up or approached by the police that I'd be treated differently than them. There was no big surprise when I did get locked up for a long time. I got support from them, too. They did their time, they got out, they supported me, along with a lot of the community who continued to support me, which was surprising. They took care of my son, of course, and they brought him to every prison I was put in. I was rotated seventeen times in the federal system, and they brought my son each time to each prison from the time he was nine years old, and he grew up and he had a son and he'd bring his son—grandfather, son, and the dad. That was a connection I had, the support I had, during the time I was in prison.

And in every prison I met political prisoners, whether Puerto Ricans, whites, Black nationalists, Native Americans, and these were all political prisoners at the time. In fact, Leonard Peltier just got out, and we sent Leonard $1,000 just a while ago. We continue our support.

Eric King: That leads me into one of our questions. When you all went inside it seems like there was a plethora of other political prisoners, like that was a time when there was a lot of revolutionary activity. Janine, if you could start, could you talk to us about different political prisoners you met inside and your abilities to make friendships, organize, or just be together and what that was like?

Janine Bertram: I met a few political prisoners. There was one person that was from the Weather Underground. I think people came into the prison because there were only two federal women's prisons at that time, so they had to send people to FCI Pleasanton or Alderson. That's where bo [brown] was for her entire time. But I met independentistas, some indigenous women, and one person from the Weather Underground, and it was really good to have those connections inside. Then, just a few months before I got out, they brought one of the Brigade members to that prison and that was really good, too. We had never been the best of friends even in the Brigade, but we were quite glad to see each other at that point in time.

Eric King: Did you bond closer inside?

Janine Bertram: Yes, certainly closer in a way, although when you're underground you do bond.

Eric King: And then with the other women that you spent time with, did you all do anything together inside? Did you live together, did you do crafts together, or was it just like seeing each other and respecting one another?

Janine Bertram: Oh, no, I mean we didn't do anything formally like study groups or something like that, but we certainly spent time together on the yard.

Eric King: Was there any racial divides in that prison at that time, like who you could live with, who you could eat with?

Janine Bertram: No, not set up by the state. I mean certainly there was racism among prisoners.

Eric King: Sure. Mark, you were at a thousand different prisons, can you start with telling us where you first landed in the feds and then other political prisoners that you met and grew close with or got to know?

Mark Cook: Well, first of all, I was sent to Leavenworth and the warden or

superintendent didn't want me in that prison—even though I was sent by the court and I had a long term—but he didn't want me, so they sent me to Georgia, to another federal prison. While I was down there I met some of the political prisoners: Richard Picariello from a group out in the Northeast, there was a Panther, and there was, I can't remember all their names right now, but there were many that I met just in that prison alone. There were so many killings at the time I showed up. I didn't stay there very long. They shipped out three busloads of us, about thirty to each bus, scattered around the United States to thin down to the political prisoners. It was called the Atlanta migration.

I ended up back at Leavenworth, where the warden did not want me, and they told him to take me as I was. There was going to be no rejection at all. They told the warden that. So they locked me up there in solitary confinement for a while, until people outside told them what they were doing and they finally let me out into the population, which had many political prisoners there: the Puerto Ricans, the Black Panthers, AIM people. That's where I met Standing Deer and Leonard Peltier and we were able to get together.

Eric King: I think I saw a picture of you, Leonard, and Tom Manning together. I might be misremembering, but I'm pretty sure I did.

Mark Cook: Jaan Laaman. Yeah, there's a great many of us all. We'd gather up, we had one of our comrades who ran the photo shop, Larry Giddings, he was an anarchist out of California. They did a prison break in Seattle, got three other people out, and had a shootout with the police. Anyways, they ended up inside, and his job was to work in the photo shop. So people who wanted to send photos home to their parents, they got the single shots, but he called us all at once, he put the call out on the yard to get all of the political prisoners at that time, and they took these pictures. So there's a lot of these pictures that have been taken and distributed around the country now. We got together, we had lots of time to talk about errors we made and also successes. We thought we were building on a movement that would continue long after we got out, but it kind of dwindled and turned into something else. A lot of the people we knew passed away, and a lot of new people were born after the movement, so they really didn't know. Anyways, Leavenworth was the first place I went to. When Larry Giddings came to the prison he was a youngster at the time, very young, and I gave him his clothes and other stuff. You know, the things that a prisoner needs when he goes to prison. When I got there they did the same thing. When I showed up, immediately prisoners gave me all the essentials I needed to get started off in prison.

Eric King: Larry Giddings, that was Bill Dunne's codefendant?

Mark Cook: Yeah, that was Bill Dunne's codefendant. And it's sad to say he was strong in prison, he was strong to a point, but they broke him eventually. It's sad to say. But we met him when he got out, and he lived maybe two blocks from me, and I'd go up and visit him. We talked, and I tried to get him involved with the movement on the street, but they broke him. Anyways, it's a sad story, but he was strong while he was inside, he never rolled over on anybody other than himself, you know, and that happened to several prisoners. It wasn't all that easy to spend ten and twenty years inside a prison away from your families and friends.

Eric King: When I was inside racial politics was huge, like they would really push violence if you were a race traitor or co-mingling. Mark, was that your situation there, were you allowed to basically have white comrades or eat with white people or other races?

Mark Cook: A lot of the political prisoners were of different colors—Latinos, Puerto Ricans, Blacks, whites. The ones on the left, we got together, we ate at the same tables, we did what we wanted to do. Nobody really messed with us, and we also contended with the other side—the Aryan Brotherhood and the KKK and the bikers and people like that. There was respect between us as prisoners, but we weren't on the same path as far as the struggle went.

I only stayed at Leavenworth for I think it was about three years, and they decided to transfer me, but I found out they were doing what they call transit therapy. They kept moving me. They moved me to Lompoc, then they moved me to … I can't remember all the names, but I did list them. I wrote a good diagram of where I was, what I did while I was in prison—working, school, the people I had met.

Janine Bertram: So were they all federal prisoners?

Mark Cook: Well, most of them were federal prisoners. Later on they brought some from California. They had riots in California prisons, and

they sent them into the federal system. There were also people that lived on the islands. I guess they were Americans, I'm not sure, but they did send them into the federal prison. We had one they had kidnapped in Italy, a so-called terrorist, and they brought him over to America and locked him up. That was common, where they bring foreign prisoners and put them in the federal penitentiary. That's another part of the story. But they transferred me seventeen times.

Eric King: Janine, I want to talk about family and community support. Right now I see there's lots of abolitionist movements, there's Books Through Bars, just different ways to support those inside. When you were in, what was your level of support like? Did the community show up for you? Did family show up for you?

Janine Bertram: It was huge. It was huge. There were maybe three people I knew that didn't support me, and I got huge support from the Seattle community, from the California community, from my family, from everybody. I mean, people even sent money and put it on my books. It was amazing, I thought.

Eric King: Were you all allowed, like in Pleasanton, were you allowed to have books, magazines, newspapers, everything like that?

Janine Bertram: Yeah, pretty much, although I found out later the mailroom was definitely just throwing away some anarchist papers.

Eric King: As they will.

Janine Bertram: They even let the Marxist-Leninist literature through, but...

Mark Cook: A book called the *Turner Diaries*, now, it's a racist story, you know, and that's the only book they tried to censor me. I filed a complaint that they let us have Hitler's book, *Mein Kampf*, the Dumb Coffin, in there and some other books from the klan, and a lot of the racist groups in the South, but they wouldn't let Black prisoners have the *Turner Diaries*. So I filed my legal complaint, and finally they just gave up on me and let me have the book. But I was a jailhouse lawyer, and I did some pretty good work, and I got an appeal out, and we changed some of the law, but a lot of it turned into...

Eric King: Wait, I want to ask you that later. Janine, real quick before I switch over, what was the phone and visiting situations like in your institution? Were you allowed unlimited calls, unlimited visits? What was that like?

Janine Bertram: Unlimited calls. I mean, as long as you weren't occupying all the phones all the time, there were other prisoners that needed to use it. And people had to get on a visitors list, but, yeah, during visiting hours we could have as many people on our lists as could come in.

Eric King: So there wasn't the three-hundred minutes a month or anything like that that they have now?

Janine Bertram: No.

Eric King: God bless that, thank goodness. So Mark, I don't even know if any of us remember the question, but did you have the same amount of support from the outside world and from your family?

Mark Cook: Oh, I had great support, and a little support from my family. I mean, I had my sister and my son and niece, and they wrote to me regularly. But I had a lot of support from Seattle, and from the Panthers. In fact, from around the world, surprisingly. They were doing highway strikes in Germany and in New England, mostly by Anarchist Black Cross people. A lot of support from them. And I got support from Assata. I got support from Assata after I got out, but we kind of knew each other. Rita and Assata had celled together at one point, so we connected in a kind of family relationship. When they sent her to Cuba, we knew the whole route when they busted her out of jail and sent her over there. I think she's kind of interested in me, because I had busted somebody out of jail, too. So it was kind of a brother-sister relationship. I got an awfully sweet letter from her, and I've kept it for all these years.

Eric King: Where were Rita and Assata celled together?

Janine Bertram: At FCI Alderson in West Virginia. Like I said, there were only two women's prisons so you were either in Alderson or ... I'm sorry, there's one person that's asked not to be associated with the Brigade, but they kept her in jail in San Diego for years because there were only two prisons and Rita, bo, was in one and I was in the other one.

Mark Cook: Marilyn Buck had joined a group that busted Assata out of jail and took the route down to Belize and over to Cuba. In fact, we kind of followed that route in our minds, too, like if I leave the United States, now I'm going to follow that same route, if I can get across the borders. You know, they've got me blocked North and South now, though.

Eric King: Mark, I want to know about the same stuff I asked Janine. Was the phone situation and the book situation the same there except for the Turner Diaries?

Mark Cook: Yes, pretty much the same. We had fifteen minutes on the phone, and they had a couple thousand people in prison, so you had to wait your turn in men's prisons. There was nobody ever blocked, though sometimes they would censor you if you were on the phone talking. Most of the time they did. There was one incident where somebody went over their time, and he wouldn't come out when another prisoner was knocking on the wall. He ended up killing a guy, and ended up doing solitary confinement. Thomas Silverstein was his name, and he was in solitary confinement at Leavenworth.

Eric King: You were there when Silverstein was there?

Mark Cook: Yeah, I was. Anyway, it was a struggle. I mean, we respected each other, but there were some people that tried to bulldog or pressure the younger prisoners, and it was a fight getting on the phone a lot of times. You just almost had to know if you had your name on the list. We'd look out for you and make sure you got on the phone. The political prisoners were very strict on that, supporting other people. We were the ones that filed most of the grievances. We had the great anarchist Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin. He was a great anarchist in the federal system. He wrote a book Anarchism and the Black Revolution. I don't know if you read that one, but he gave me my first impression of what an anarchist was. Well, actually my first impression was from Standing Deer—this is Leonard Peltier's partner, they were both Souix—he was an anarchist, and he gave me the best impression of what an anarchist should be.

I'm not knocking bo. bo was part of the Brigade, and it was divided—it was not a solid, single person running through it. It was Marxist-Leninist, it was Panthers, there were anarchists, and so it all split up that way. But we got together great. We just did our jobs, everybody knew what their job was to do. We got jobs done.

Eric King: Prisons seemed so different back then. There was so much solidarity and respect for each other back then it seems. What was the clothes situation? Because sometimes I see pictures, and it looks like people are wearing their own clothes. Were you able to do that, both of you?

Janine Bertram: Yes.

Mark Cook: More recreational clothes, they let us do that in Leavenworth. I mean, in the federal men's system we were given army surplus clothes, mostly the olive colored clothes.

Eric King: And Janine, you were able to get in your own clothes, you said?

Janine Bertram: Yep.

Eric King: So how did that work, would your family or friends just mail it in, and then they'd search it?

Janine Bertram: Yes, we were allowed, I think, three or four packages a year, and that was how you got your clothes.

Eric King: That's so neat. The next big question I'd like to know about is how the administrations interacted with you—if there was repression, if they were worse to you than other prisoners, if they did things intentionally to make your time worse. Basically, how were you treated by the guards and the administration?

Janine Bertram: For me, it depended on the various guards. There were some that didn't like political prisoners, and so they would be a little bit more repressive, but for the most part I didn't have any hassles from the administration or the guards.

Eric King: Okay, sweet.

Janine Bertram: But of course I would have fought it. They don't like that.

Eric King: Janine, I believe Marilyn Buck, Linda Evans, and Laura

Whitehorn were all at Dublin also. Were you there before them?

Janine Bertram: Yes, I'm pretty sure it was before.

Eric King: That's awesome.

Janine Bertram: That's one of my regrets.

Mark Cook: One of the thoughts that slipped by me a while ago is Marilyn Buck had helped break Assata out. When it was time for her to get out, Ed and I had contributed $15,000 for her release when she got out. We went down to Oakland, they had a big party and a lot of people contributed money. So from the Brigade we gave them all that money. And we were going to give $100 a year for each year a political prisoner was inside. This is after we got out of prison. I know you're talking about while we were in prison, but I just wanted to get that by, that we did things like that, even for Larry Giddings, a guy who got broken while he was in prison, we even gave him $1,000 when he got out. And like I said, just recently we did Leonard Peltier the same way, so we look out for people. It's been a long time, and a lot of people have forgotten them inside, but we'll never forget them.

Eric King: Are there still political prisoners that you all are actively supporting today, who are still inside?

Mark Cook: Yeah, as much as we can. We don't have the money we had before. Most of our support went to the California prisoners at one time, but that's a totally separate story. After we got out, we did some miraculous work down there, and the prisoners did, too.

Eric King: I want to hear more about Rita being friends with Assata, and you all being friends with Assata. That's wild history.

Janine Bertram: I didn't really have a relationship with Assata, although I at one point got a letter through to her telling her how much her writings meant to me when I was in prison. But Rita talked to me a lot about Assata and, in fact, while I was in I heard that Rita had a lover, so I was quite jealous and upset with that, and angry. I let her know that, and then she told me who her lover was, and I was thrilled because it was Assata. I mean, that was a great connection for her to have.

Mark Cook: Well I never had socializing inside, so I didn't get none of the goodies but anyway...

Eric King: Janine, did you just say that Rita and Assata were partners inside?

Janine Bertram: Yes.

Eric King: Were you and Rita together at that time?

Janine Bertram: Yeah, I mean, we were together until we were arrested.

Eric King: Oh, okay. And Mark, what were your interactions with Assata like?

Mark Cook: I didn't really have an interaction. She was a Black Panther and we supported each other from prison to prison. Outside of that, we had a circle while we were in prison, and we were able to write to each other, illegally. They didn't want us to communicate, so we changed our names, and that pretty much did it. I just used my initials. I was known as MC and Ed Mead was known as Grace and Therese was called Calico. So we were able to communicate in this circle. And when it came time for Ed to leave, we were supposed to never be put together, me and Ed ...

Eric King: Were you guys at Sheridan together?

Mark Cook: That was the last time, yeah. That's where they made the mistake and put us together.

Eric King: I don't know if everyone watching will know this, but there have been members of the Brigade that we've lost over time, either early in the days or even recently with Ed and bo. Are there any special memories you all would like to bring up or talk about, or just things that you feel about your lost comrades after prison?

Mark Cook: After prison, I associated with most everybody except John Sherman. I went down to California, in the Castro area, I think it was near Oakland, something like that, and me and Therese hooked up there. We wrote letters back and forth until I got a chance to go down there during our Panther—every five or ten years or something like that all the

Panthers in the United States try to meet down there in Oakland. So I went, I met with her down there, and over in Oakland I'd go to see bo all the time. Several times in Oakland I'd meet with bo. And of course Ed and I, before Ed came back to Seattle, I went down to San Francisco and met him and his partner down there. I never associated with John; there was kind of an internal thing there. Ed met with him and visited him.

I've met with other prisoners, like the Attica Brothers, for instance. I met with Big Black, and we actually got pictures together, and the Native American movement person out of Attica, Splitting the Sky, came over. I was interested really in what they were doing after they got out of prison, because when I got out of prison I immediately went into prisoner support programs. But they were mostly speaking at seminars and things like that. They weren't building a program like I thought they would. I was really impressed the way they put things together inside that prison during the Attica Rebellion, that was one of the best things I ever saw in my life, the way they could come together and discard all the aggravations they had with each other, as in race and other things, and come together that way. I saw that happen again in California—me and Ed spurred that on in California—same thing where everybody came together. They had the same grievances, and so they stuck together, and they made this agreement to have no more aggression against each other's gangs or races while this is going on.

Janine Bertram: What was the question? I can't remember.

Eric King: The question was if you wanted to talk about the members that you all lost or memories you had with them, impressions about them even.

Janine Bertram: I have a lot of memories. I miss Ed, the most recent Brigade member to leave the planet. We all spent quite a bit of time together. Also, I guess I just mainly want to say that my comrades are people that I absolutely down to my core can totally trust. I mean there is no way I'll get stabbed in the back. It's wonderful to have connections to humans where you have that kind of relationship. Certainly with both Rita and Ed I had that. Bruce Seidel, I never met, so I didn't know him at all. But they're important relationships, and they're really strong people.

For example, when I got together with Rita, or when we met each other as

friends and I was doing COYOTE and she and Therese were doing this prison program at the women's prison, Women Out Now, and Rita let me know what a racist I was. I don't mean I was an outrageous racist, but I'd grown up white.

Eric King: So you had internalized stuff.

Janine Bertram: Yeah, and I didn't understand that at all. And I feel like that was a fairly important lesson. But she had this very direct way of talking that wasn't hostile, and I think that's something a lot of us don't have those skills. I don't have very good skills that way and she did.

Eric King: I am still working on that. Did you all stay friends consistently the entire time post-release and everything?

Janine Bertram: Yeah, I mean she was living in California and Therese was living in California so it was limited contact, but whenever I was down there I would see them, or I would see Rita and once in a while would see Therese.

Eric King: What about Ed?

Janine Bertram: Oh, yeah, Ed, we were in contact, and when he got out we were in contact and worked together on the Mark Cook Defense Committee.

Eric King: I'd like to hear more about that.

Mark Cook: Ah, the great defense committee. They got a little bloody in their advertising. They did this picture with a pistol with blood dripping from it.

Janine Bertram: That wasn't a good idea.

Mark Cook: And I said, "No." And Therese said, "No, that's a bad idea, Ed." But he was strongly in support of us. I'll never forget Ed. It was just a couple years ago that he passed away. I got his cane. He said if he died I could have his cane. It's not very nice, but after he died I went to his wife and said, "Ed said I got to have his cane." Then I thought "Oh, what am I doing?" She just kind of ignored me and walked away. I came up another

day, and she handed me his cane. Anyway, I was close to Ed, and bo, too.

I went down to see bo the day before she died. Her mind really wasn't there. She'd look at me, and we'd keep asking her questions over and over again. Her partner was taking care of her, and she asked, "What are you going to tell Janine?" They were sending a message through me back to Janine here in Seattle when I was in Oakland, and she said, "What are you going to tell Janine when you see her?" She wouldn't say. We kept asking her the question, and finally she said, "Tell Janine I love her," and that was it. She died the next day. In fact, I think she died that night while I was in the motel getting ready to go back home. I'll always remember her. I mean she was a real trip. She's a worker, she got things done. You know, she's the one that took me inside the women's prison for the first time in my life and got me hooked up with Women Out Now and all the movements in Seattle.

Then there was Ed. Ed was a real underground person who shouldn't have lived aboveground. I don't know why, but he was great. He had a mind for propaganda, building bombs, he had the movement in him and everything. I just couldn't stay away from him. Until the day he died I was with him. When he died, he had fallen the day before and broken some bones. It was so painful, he couldn't move, and they had to get somebody outside to give him enough morphine to get him in the bed. But the next day I went up to see him and to talk to him, and he couldn't talk. I just remembered all the road trips we did together.

Eric King: That's very sweet. Thank you both for sharing those things. Janine, you brought it up a little bit at the beginning, do you want to talk to us more about what COYOTE was and what it meant to you?

Janine Bertram: Well, when I was becoming a feminist I realized that, at least in that era, women had to be either virgin queens or French whores. I'm exaggerating a little bit, but I heard about COYOTE which had been started by Margo St. James in San Francisco and that was the work I wanted to do, organizing. I was in the LGBTQ community at the time, and I wanted to decriminalize prostitution, now called sex workers. And it means a lot to me to change societal attitudes and make revolution, so COYOTE was part of that.

Eric King: Do you feel like where we're at now compared to where COYOTE was then, do you see a big progress, do you see it returning, do you see it only moving forward in regards to these issues?

Janine Bertram: You know, I hope it moves forward. In some ways it seems like it's moving backwards. I'm not talking about the movement, but if you look at general media it seems to be getting more racist, more sexist, more backwards, and I think my hope is that that means people will be encouraged to organize and develop and fight it.

Eric King: Mark, I would like to ask about your time in prison in your first case, before you became a political prisoner. Could you talk about Walla Walla and how you organized within that prison? I want to hear all about it, too. Don't hold back.

Mark Cook: Well, my first activism was against racism in the laundry, in the workplaces, and it was something I was really strong in my heart against. When I struck out they threw me in the hole. They wanted me to talk but I wouldn't talk to anybody. I wouldn't give them a reason why I did what I did, but when I came out, I got a pat on the back by prisoners who said, "At least you tried." But another instance came up where prisoners had a choice to pick movies. This was in the early time when the prisoners could pick movies. Your Black or white or Native American, your group could pick the next movie that's going to be shown on Friday night. They picked a movie called 100 Rifles. You might have heard of that, with Jim Brown and Raquel Welch. And the racist white prisoners said, "No, no. That's not going to be shown in here." So we just pressed it. We said, "We're going to see the movie, or we're not coming out of our cells."

So that was the beginning of my political action inside of prison, and we ended up locking the prison down because we wouldn't come out of the cells. The white prisoners went to work for a while, then they came and said, "No, we're going to go along with you." In my mind I said, "This is a prisoners movement, a workers movement. We're working class." And this is when I started focusing. I started reading and trying to put things together, and later on I met my buddy, Clem Blanchie, and he said, "We've got to start a Panther group in here." I said, "Well, what are you going to do?" He said, "I'll write to Oakland to see," and they gave us a chapter. We were the second chapter outside of Oakland to start a Panther group. The Seattle Panthers were the first ones, and we were the second ones. We had the 10-point program, and the second point was about workers, so I stuck

with that. That was my main theme. I worked long struggling with everybody else, and I had a grievance against the warden. I can't remember what it was about, but I was determined to kill the warden while I was in prison. So while at work there was some materials back there, and I started getting pipes together, and I was scraping match heads off. They used to give out cigarettes and matches, and I was filling up that, and I figured nobody knew what I was doing behind this place where I was painting. The Canadians came up to me and said, "Hey, we know what you're doing. Don't do that. Come to us, and I want to talk to you." So I was on the yard one time, a big yard where everybody goes out for recreation, and they're against the wall playing chess. I go over and talk to them, and they said, "If you keep your mouth shut we'll give you something bigger than that bomb." So I said, "Okay, we'll give you some help if you give us some help." Now, these were two Canadians, there was a Mexican guy, and a Native American guy sitting in this little group here. They said, "Don't tell anybody what I'm telling you right now and don't tell anybody if you get involved with this. We will hurt you." These are my friends, so I said, "Okay, tell me a little about what you're doing."

So they told me they were running this illegal underground newspaper called *The Bomb*. How they made it, they had read some story by an ex-World War II prisoner of war in Germany who, in order to escape, needed printed identification, so they invented this little press to make this thing. They're doing this in Germany, so they showed me how we could do it in the prison and get away with it. We had all these pieces together. I don't want to go through the specific points right now, but we did put the press together, and we printed these grievances that were going on in prison that everybody could identify with. You didn't have to be Black, white, or anything else, the grievances were the same: You couldn't wear hair on your face, no mustaches, no sideburns, you had to wear long hair, etcetera. So we told them that's one of our grievances. We're going to tell the prisoners to start growing all your hair, growing all the hair you can grow, the hair on your head, long hair, etcetera. So all the prisoners did it. We encouraged the head of our inmate advisory council, Big Don Cole, and told him we wanted to do the same thing. He made a picket sign and he walked around the yard with this picket sign saying "Do you care? Grow your hair." So everybody in the penitentiary was growing hair. There's no violations, they couldn't lock anybody up, so this is another move, this is the the prop, the move, and I noticed that it was called, *The Bomb.* I said, "I wish we had a real bomb." But it was called *The Bomb*, and it was

successful in what we were doing. Eventually, through this underground, we controlled the prisoners. We wrote their constitution to change the way they were behaving, the way the prison was treating them, and the prison agreed with writing this memorandum, trying to make changes. We told them when we did it, we did the memorandum ourselves. Nobody knew we were doing it. We pretended we were working aboveground and said, "This is a bad agreement. You've got to tear it up and burn it in front of the mess hall." So all the prisoners came down through the agreement in then burned it up, and we made a better one. It was way too far, shooting for the moon, and the administration said, "No, you're not going to get none of that. You guys write it again." So we wrote another one, and for about three years it stuck in that prison and changed the whole prison system, and nobody knew who us six were who were writing *The Bomb* underground.

But also I was a Panther at that time, and the first position of the Panther is that we want to set our own destiny as for our community, so I plugged that into what I was doing. I'm a Panther working with these Canadians, who have no idea what a Panther is. There was another guy, one white guy, and the Canadians were white too, but you kind of separate them. Anyways, when I got out they finally had the thing moving, and I got moved out to go to Seattle. That's when I ran across the George Jackson Brigade. What we were doing in *The Bomb*, it was just a paper bomb, but they were building a bomb, and we were also doing propaganda in that paper. Ed was terrific at propaganda. I mean he's the greatest propagandist in the world. He's doing propaganda, and to sell his propaganda he needed *The Bomb* back. He didn't know it was armed propaganda. He created something totally different. In fact, it was a month ago I think he said somebody in Europe had the same idea about hitting a substation. They were union workers trying to get changes made and it worked the same as in Seattle. Again, recently there was another big substation explosion and the same thing happened. I don't think we started it, but it's a good idea to spread around. Obviously, if you want attention you have to have armed struggle—not a gun going after anybody, this is the explosion. You could do it with just plain fireworks, huge fireworks, and do it, but Ed liked to get into little details of making a bomb, putting the gun. He came to my apartment and showed me how to build a bomb. He had a plate with a little gunpowder on it to show how you hooked up his wires and the flash bulb and batteries, and how the clock when the hand went around it contacted, and the little powder goes

poof. He said that's the way we're going to do it inside. But he showed us he had the skills for that. I had the skills for organizing prisoners. For three years I organized prisoners. This is the prisoners movement we started, but I just shot ahead real quick.

Going back to prison, it all started really with that movie with Jim Brown and Raquel Welch. They were telling us what we couldn't do, but we're going to choose our own destiny. It's kind of like what Harriet Tubman said, "I freed 300 slaves, and I'd have freed more if they only knew they were slaves." Prisoners were the same way. In a sense, for that little instance, we had freed prisoners, we started freeing them, and we could have freed a hell of a lot more if they only knew they were prisoners. So when I got out I started in the prison movement and kept it going till the very end.

Eric King: How many Panthers were there at Walla Walla?

Mark Cook: We had about twenty-two Panthers in Walla Walla. The Seattle Panthers came in to meet us, and they brought a doctor named Dr. Green, and he tested that whole institution for sickle cell anemia. That was the first testing that had ever gone on in a prison. Back in Seattle, the Panthers set up a clinic headed by Dr. Green, who was a doctor at the University of Washington. He said, "What are you guys trying to do?" They said, "We want a clinic here." And they had the bandaids and whatever little things like that. He said, "No, you guys need a real clinic. Just come out to the University of Washington, back a truck up to that warehouse, and I'll be waiting for you." So they went over there and backed it up, and he loaded them up with everything—operating tables, all the medications and bandages, and took it all back to Seattle and set up a clinic that exists to this day.

Eric King: I love hearing all this. Janine, I'd like to talk about what it was like when you got released? How was it finding housing, work, and then what led to your work on the ADA?

Janine Bertram: I had a lot of support when I got released, too. I got released to California and went to work for the prison parenting program that we started in the prison. It was in Oakland. Actually, I had enough community support that it was pretty much easy to find housing and transportation.

Eric King: Did you struggle with work at all?

Janine Bertram: No. That's why I went to Oakland, because I had a job there.

Eric King: I misunderstood, my bad. Will you tell us why you started with the ADA, how you got involved with that and your role in it?

Janine Bertram: For one thing, I was becoming disabled. But I had a partner in Washington, DC who was one of the leaders of the national disability movement. So I got involved with writing and doing work on disability rights.

Also, there's a parallel between prisons and other institutions. If you look at what our society wants to do with disabled people, it's lock us all up in nursing homes. And nursing homes and psych facilities and prisons are very, very similar. In fact, I think the abolition movement should really expand to the other institutions in society, because they're all extremely oppressive.

Eric King: Hell yeah. Thank you. Mark, can you tell us about the last release you had, what that was like, how it felt to you, the support you had, just things like that?

Mark Cook: Well, I didn't really want to get released. I mean, I just did a thirty year term with the feds, and I had two more life terms to do for the state. It's consecutive. And I was just planning on doing little stuff inside the prison, continuing the movement inside the prison. But Ed and the people in Seattle decided they wanted me out, and they started a Support Mark Cook organization, with a t-shirt and handouts. And it wasn't just in Seattle, it was kind of around the United States. The money and support came in from all around, and I'd say we raised $20,000 in a really short period of time. I was examined by two state psychiatrists inside, and pretty much they said I should never be out. They hired a psychiatrist from the streets, and he presented his position, and he said the paperwork said the state's using, those things are outdated. They don't use those anymore. So finally the parole board said they would let me loose, but I never showed remorse for shooting that cop.

Before that ever happened, I had written a letter because I was back in the

state and I'm doing life—I'm never getting out—so I'm going to write to this cop. And I tell him I never really intended to kill you, I just wanted to get my prisoner out. That was in the letter, it was a long letter. But then what happened was they said they didn't want me out because I never showed any remorse. My attorney nudged me about the letter, and I said that's just between me and the cop. It's got nothing to do with the parole board. She said, let them see it, so she got the letter—let them see it—and they looked at it and said we're going to turn you loose in one year if you can act right. I've never had an infraction for twenty-four years in prison. Never one. Well, I had one, of course. Walking the wrong way on the grass lawn. But anyway, that doesn't count. So they said one more year I'd get out.

When I got out I was handed $8,000. It was a lot of money they put into this thing, hiring psychiatrists and everything. They paid for them, but they handed me $8,000. Ed was there, right up front. Ed was making the propaganda, doing street theater, burning up a coffin out on the street. Ed was really a wonderful guy. You'd love to have met him. Anyway, I got a place to stay, a car, they got me a job, so everything was swinging, and I was back into my prison movement again.

Eric King: A general theme that I've heard from you both is wild support, like people really showing up, and the community really showing up. So one of the viewer questions is essentially asking why do you think that isn't as strong nowadays? Prisoner support doesn't seem as tangible, as vocal, as mobile, as it seemed to be in previous times. Do you have an opinion on why that is or what could be done to improve it?

Mark Cook: The strongest movement out here has lasted for years, and it's progressing from the labor movement to unions, and we see it today where this nut working with Trump has fired people. It's a workers movement, and it's in greater demand now. The prison movement was just part of it. That's what drew me into it, but the workers' movement is really pushing everybody now. All this money we make for people, and they just keep it for themselves, never give it to workers. Everybody should have a job, have an affordable job if they want one. The money is there, and there's a lot of work to be done, so this is a class struggle. I wore the wrong hat today. I have a class struggle hat and I should have worn it. But this is class struggle. The whole thing that we're talking about here, you can water it down, but that's where movement is headed, and everybody isn't jumping off into it. Our politicians aren't helping. All of our politicians have been bought off by these promoters. They buy people to lose, pay them to lose positions. I'm talking too much.

Eric King: You are never talking too much. Janine, the question was on support. Did you get the same as other people in prison or do you feel like you had more support than other people who weren't political prisoners?

Janine Bertram: I had way more support and I think it's because of the Seattle community. Because I was a political prisoner. Yeah, that's about it. And I think that's true for you too, Mark. It wasn't just Ed and Cynthia.

Mark Cook: It was a movement outside, too, and in Seattle.

Eric King: I don't know if you're still involved in the prisoner support movement broadly, but do you feel that it is as strong today as it was when you and Mark and everyone else were inside?

Janine Bertram: I don't know enough about it because I'm not involved with it. But I doubt that it's as strong as it was then, or at least in the Pacific Northwest. And in the Bay Area it was very strong, and I don't think it is today.

Mark Cook: I started when I got out of prison to this day I helped found what we call the owlsmen, Organized Workers and Labors again. I'm back on the labor thing. It exists and we have it every month. We meet together, we're fundraising—we just pass a hat—and we have enough money to keep this thing going every month. I mean, I'm in my 80s, almost my 90s now, but I haven't stopped working toward this, trying to push these people into a workers movement, the main thing to drive this country back where it should be. It's been taken over.

Janine Bertram: It's a class struggle

Mark Cook: It is a class struggle. It's the rich against the poor, and the poor are generally workers, as a working class. I know it sounds a little dry to say something like that, but I have never given up on that, and I'm just a part of this movement.

Janine Bertram: Eat the rich!

Mark Cook: Yeah, eat the rich and kick their ass for the working class!

Eric King: Mark, I don't know if you'll remember this, but about nine years ago you were in Denver for a political prisoner conference and Lynne Stewart was there, Kazi Toure was there, and my wife was the photographer for that. She's got all these pictures of you with Lynne Stewart.

Mark Cook: Oh yeah? I was reading the letter just a couple days ago that she sent me. She's passed now.

Eric King: Yeah, do you have any memories of Lynne Stewart? Did you guys get to spend time together?

Mark Cook: Like I said, just a couple days ago I was re-reading a lot of letters that were sent to me when I got out. I had never read some of the letters. Maybe they have money in those things! But I've been sitting down reading with some people. Yeah, Lynne Stewart, I used to have a picture up on my wall with prisoners and her.

Eric King: Did you ever meet her, Janine?

Janine Bertram: No.

Eric King: Do you feel like there were movement lawyers back then, that backed you all up, or was it just the community support?

Janine Bertram: Community support, although they would pull lawyers in if they were needed.

Eric King: What about you, Mark?

Mark Cook: Well, lawyers were really close to my movement. In fact, I ended up working in the public defender's office when I got out.

Eric King: Did either of you two ever write for *Prison Legal News*?

Mark Cook: Oh, that was Ed's paper. When I got to Monroe, I worked with it too. And Paul Wright is the one that heads it up right now. We're kind of sour on Paul, but he made it something that probably reaches more people than we could have reached in prison. We wrote it for prisoners, by prisoners. That was never to leave the prison. It was like *The Bomb*, something prisoners created. But it's out now and I've even heard judges who are applauding it. Some of the stuff we put in it made a synopsis easy for prisoners to find in the PLN.

Eric King: I was just curious because I knew Ed wrote it, and it is *huge* inside right now. I knew twenty or thirty people that had subscriptions.

Mark Cook: They fought us through hell trying to keep us from printing that thing. It started off kind of an underground thing, and we got it going. Me and Paul Wright, before I got out, we got together and we filed a class action suit and the court said we're not taking that as a class action suit. They were changing the laws in Seattle and making things hard for prisoners, so we decided we're going to do in the underground what you call a boilerplate complaint, and we had to do a lot of underground work, breaking into the offices, then getting the printer rolling and set up, and spreading it around the state of Washington to tell the prisoners to mail it to this court. Finally, the court said all right it's a class action, so last great movement before I got out of prison. Yeah, Paul Wright got out later on, he was in Seattle for a while, and he comes back every once in a while to see us.

Eric King: Janine, what would you like people today to know about consequence awareness or what prison is like, what your prison experience was like, what other people could expect? What would you say to young radicals today?

Janine Bertram: I'd say, *don't just talk about revolution, make one*. I think prisons are getting worse, and that fighting and organizing is more important than ever. Basically I agree with Mark about class struggle being the issue, and worker organizing. Organizing in prison with other prisoners as workers is a really great thing to act on. But outside, make a revolution and take over.

Eric King: When you were doing your actions, Janine, was prison ever at the front of your mind? Were you prepared or expecting to go inside?

Janine Bertram: I don't know if it was ever at the front of my mind, but I certainly was aware that it was a good possibility.

Eric King: Did that ever scare you? Were you ever like, "Oh, I don't want to do this," or was it all...

Janine Bertram: I never thought that I could hardly wait to get there, but no, it didn't really frighten me. It just was what it was.

Mark Cook: The pain of prison, that's what I'm afraid of. The pain. I'm not just afraid of it. If there's no pain, it doesn't bother me at all. I've lived forty years of my life or more in prison—two-thirds of my life—so I know it well. I know that rotten son of the bitches are in there, and I know there's some good people that want to help you. And I know it's the same way when I look at the prisoners. There's prisoners who want to help and then other prisoners who are working against them constantly.

Eric King: Mark, would you have a message for young radicals today about what to expect, or what prison was like, or anything along those lines?

Mark Cook: There has to be a smoother transition from prison out into the working class, and that slavery thing they have is causing more crime than they realize. If they had a smooth transition from prison right into society—not from slavery, but having people paid for work they're doing inside. If they come out they're going to be looking for more a raise in salary, so when they come out it could be much smoother. You talked about the sex workers. If that's not going to get them anywhere in life there ought to be some kind of smooth transition built for women to get into work before going into that, so they can move on up. That will kill crime in a lot of ways. You always find people who profit from crime are generally those upper class people. I'm telling you, they never go to jail, but they make millions and billions breaking the law. The lower classes won't break the law if they have a job. We're working class people from cradle to grave. If you want to go, go that way, and you'll find time to have fun and play, too.

Eric King: I was really shocked when I got out, because I was in the halfway house for just a little bit, but I was really shocked to see how many people were released from prison with nothing—no money, no clothes, no toothbrush. And then the only jobs they could get were standing out in the cold holding a construction street sign, or janitors. And that's what you just reminded me of, that there is no pipeline to success from there.

Mark Cook: Exactly. And they have the money for it. They throw money away on some of the dumbest stuff. If you get rid of prison or complain about prisons, they've got prisoners working making more money from the taxes they're getting from the prisoners. Pay them a fair wage. They just don't see that far.

Eric King: I was paid $15 basically a day. I made $12 a month. I don't know if that was the same when you all were in, just miserable wages.

Mark Cook: Yeah, if anything.

Eric King: Before we go I would like to ask if you all have anything going on right now, anything you want to talk about or promote, now would be a good chance just to put that out there.

Mark Cook: Well, they've got a good movement going right now. They don't know it, in that place where the healthcare worker, or healthcare giant, was killed, and where Elon Musk is firing hundreds of thousands of people, there's a movement going right there, if they just give it support. There's some people saying stay away because it's violent, but they got the attention. They didn't want to do it. They didn't want to get the attention that way, by shooting somebody in the back, and they didn't want it for burning up cars, because they're not getting anything out of burning up those cars, but they're making a loud voice that has been heard, and people could hook onto that just like Vietnam or anything else and move. They've got a good thing going. It's happening in different areas where they're finally attacking the upper class, and the working class is doing it. It's a hard job getting across, too. I wish Ed was back. He'd get our armed propaganda going again.

Eric King: I love it. I was really proud to see Kansas City, where I'm from, historically it hasn't always showed up in those ways, so when I saw the Tesla dealership burning in Kansas City, I was so happy. Well done, hometown, well done.

Mark Cook: I tell you that is armed propaganda.

Eric King: Yeah. Get after it, get people involved, get people interested in what's happening.

Janine Bertram: Yes.

Eric King: Janine, do you have anything going on, anything you're working on or anything you want to talk about?

Janine Bertram: No, I don't have anything to say.

Eric King: Fair enough. One last question. We have a viewer question asking are there any groups right now that you're inspired by or seeing? Because to them it feels like the working class has kind of gone right and isn't leaning left, maybe like it did in the past. So is there anything along those lines you're seeing or feeling?

Mark Cook: No, no. I've been looking, too. I've been looking for it, seeing how I can help, because I always got a little bit of money to throw that way when something is happening.

Eric King: Janine?

Janine Bertram: I like to see things happening and I think it is going too right-wing, but also maybe it's heightening of contradictions, so I keep being hopeful, thinking there will be more organizing because of the predominance of the right-wing. But there's just a lot of pain to get there.

Eric King: When you all went in, there wasn't really the internet, so do you feel that today the internet has helped spread class consciousness and struggle, or do you think it's been a detriment because of all the bullshit and propaganda?

Mark Cook: I hate to be judgmental, but that's just what I was thinking, that it's causing more problems. People aren't getting out, they're looking at their hand, they're walking to a bus and looking at their hand.

Janine Bertram: People aren't talking to each other.

Mark Cook: They're walking down a manhole. I mean yeah, they're not looking up and seeing what's happening in the world, what's happening to them.

Eric King: I was really shocked when I got out to see, like obviously I was around when the internet was around, but I was really shocked to see the proliferation of far-right bigotry and hate, and just how normalized it had gotten because of memes and the internet and stuff like that. It was really startling to me.

So before we go, I just want to thank you both for real. I didn't know about the George Jackson Brigade before I went inside, but when I was reading the books and reading the zines, reading Ed's book where he's talking about getting a gun smuggled in to fight racism. The way that you all carried antiracism and class struggle and all those things together, and acted on them, I think is just unbelievably inspirational, and I hope that people take what you all did, not just what you said but did, and carry those things forward. It's just been a real honor and a pleasure talking to both of you for real. Please people, write prisoners, write someone inside today, support them. Thank you both so much.

Libertie Valance: Thanks, y'all. It's been a huge pleasure. I was furiously making notes on things to read up on after the conversation. I hope everybody has a great rest of their day. It's been a fantastic talk. Thank you all so much.

People, Places, Events, & Organizations

George Jackson — a revolutionary prisoner and Minister of Defense for the Black Panther Party. During his first years at San Quentin State Prison, where he was imprisoned at age 20 for stealing $70 from a gas station on a sentence of one year to life, George became involved in revolutionary activity, after becoming acquainted with the works of Marx, Lenin, Mao, and Fanon. On January 17, 1970, a prison officer shot and killed three Black prisoners during a set-up fight with members of the Aryan Brotherhood. Following their assassinations, thirteen black prisoners began a hunger strike in the hopes of securing an investigation. A grand jury was convened three days later that exonerated the prison guard after permitting no black prisoners to testify. Thirty minutes after the grand jury decision, another prison guard was thrown off a cell-block tier to his death, and George Jackson, Fleeta Drumgo, and John Clutchette—who came to be known as the Soledad Brothers—were indicted. Many revolutionaries would join the Soledad Brothers Defense Committee, such as Angela Davis who would become the leader of the committee and friend to George who sent her the book *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson*. On August 7, 1970, George Jackson's 17-year-old brother Jonathan Jackson burst into a Marin County courtroom with an automatic weapon, freed prisoners three prisoners, including Ruchell Magee, and took a judge, district attorney, and three jurors hostage to demand the release of the Soledad Brothers. Police killed Jonathan, the judge, and wounded three others in the ensuing chase. On August 21, 1971, George pulled a 9 mm pistol from beneath a wig and said: "Gentlemen, the dragon has come," quoting Vietnamese revolutionary Ho Chi Minh, and ordered prisoners' cells opened, escaped to the yard, and was murdered by a guard from a guard tower. George finished writing the book *Blood in My Eye*, which was published in 1972, just days before his escape and death. *Blood in My Eye* is a masterpiece of urban guerrilla theory, political economy, and theories of armed Black liberation.

BPP 10 Point Program — 1. We want freedom. We want power to determine the destiny of our black and oppressed communities. 2. We want full employment for our people. 3. We want an end to the robbery by the capitalist of our black and oppressed communities. 4. We want decent housing, fit for the shelter of human beings. 5. We want education for our people that exposes the true nature of this decadent American society. We want education that teaches us our true history and our role in the present-day society. 6. We want all Black men to be exempt from military service. / We want completely free health care for all black and oppressed people. 7. We want an immediate end to police brutality and murder of black people, other people of color, all oppressed people inside the United States. 8. We want an immediate end to all wars of aggression. 9. We want freedom for all Black and poor oppressed people now held in U.S. federal, state, county, city and military prisons and jails. We want trials by a jury of peers for all persons charged with so-called crimes under the laws of this country. 10. We want land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice, peace and people's community control of modern technology.

Ed Mead — a revolutionary guerrilla of the George Jackson Brigade, jailhouse lawyer, prison organizer with Men Against Sexism, and founder of *Prison Legal News*. Ed grew up in rural Alaska and spent time in and out of youth imprisonment. While in federal prison in the 60s for a pharmacy burglary (guilty) and an escape attempt from jail (innocent), Ed seriously committed himself to jailhouse lawyering and also came across radical Marxist and anarchist literature which enabled him intelligently to choose sides. After his release Ed traveled to San Francisco to "join the revolution," hoping to connect to revolutionary groups, which he did, and returned to Seattle with new-found skills. Upon returning to Seattle, Ed consulted with his good friend Bruce Seidel, who was also doing prison work in Seattle. They resolved to enact their politics of confrontation under the name of the George Jackson Brigade. Ed was captured during an unsuccessful bank expropriation, convicted, and sentenced to two consecutive life sentences. Ed was sent to the Washington state penitentiary at Walla Walla, where he organized Men Against Sexism, which successfully fought against prison rape and sexism. Ed was a seasoned jailhouse lawyer and prodigious journalist inside, founding *The Red Dragon* in the 70s, *The Abolitionist* in the 80s, and *Prison Legal News*, which still exists and is the longest running prison newspaper in the US. Once released in 1993, Ed worked tirelessly with revolutionary organizations and prisoner support groups, and worked tirelessly to free his comrade Mark Cook. Ed published the zine, *The Theory and Practice of Armed Struggle in the Northwest: A Historical Analysis* and the book *Lumpen: The Autobiography of Ed Mead*. Along with Mark, Ed is also a contributor to *Rattling the Cages: Oral Histories of North American Political Prisoners.*

Bruce Seidel — a member of the George Jackson brigade and committed revolutionary who died fighting. Bruce became active in anti-war activities at University of Illinois at Urbana in the late 1960's. He told friends he was beaten by police during a demonstration in Chicago, and others say he was beaten by police after smashing a police car window in Washington, D.C., during the May Day "Stop the Government" demonstrations in 1971. Arriving in Seattle from Illinois, Bruce immediately became active in anti-war activities, organizing on the University of Washington campus, joining demonstrators camping on the federal courthouse lawn in 1972, taking up signs in peace marches. By early 1972, Bruce had moved out of campus organizing and into the "workplace," learning a trade as a welder at Seattle Opportunities Industrialization Center. This economics student, friends say, wanted to "proletarianize the proletariat" and felt he had to work with them to do so. At the same time, Seidel had become intensely involved prisoner support projects. He showed up at Monroe State Reformatory to help with a "consciousness raising" program for white prisoners, and soon helped launch a prisoner newspaper called *Sunfighter*. Bruce chose

the following words from George Jackson as an introduction to his last testament days before his murder in a shoot out with the police during a GJB bank robbery. “There will be a special page in the book of life for the men (women) who have crawled back from the grave. This page will tell of utter defeat, ruin, passivity, and subjection in one breath; and in the next overwhelming victory and fulfillment. So take care of yourself and hold on.”

John Sherman — a member of the George Jackson brigade and revolutionary. John was a former cellmate of Ed Mead’s on McNeil Island Penitentiary and a fellow Washington State Prisoners Union member. Ed and John had first met in McNeil Island Penitentiary, then again on the outside at the Steilacoom Prisoners Support House. Afterwards, John got a job doing research and development on missiles at the Boeing plant in South Seattle. A member of the Revolutionary Union by this time, Party leadership assigned Sherman to clandestinely-organized workers in his new “shop floor.” At the time individuals who joined the RU (later Revolutionary Communist Party) were issued a rifle; when it became clear that other members didn’t intend to use theirs, John grew impatient with the organization and quit the party. Their effort, on January 23, 1976, in the small South Seattle suburb of Tukwila, resulted in the death of Seidel, the wounding of Sherman, and the arrest of both Mead and Sherman. In the winter of 1975, the Brigade attempted to rob a bank vault in the small South Seattle suburb of Tukwila, which resulted in the death of Bruce, the wounding of John, and the arrest of both Ed and John. John’s repeated visits to Harborview Hospital to have his face surgically reconstituted presented an opportunity to free him. March 10, 1976, Cook jammed a pistol in the back of Sherman’s police escort and informed him: “I’m taking your prisoner.” John was liberated as planned, but police picked up Cook a few days later. By the fall of 1977, the Brigade felt sufficiently powerful to head back to the Seattle area. They bombed the Capitol Complex in Olympia in support of striking prisoners at Walla Walla, committed several bombings in an attempt to bolster the auto machinists’ union, and set off another pipe bomb at a Mercedes-Benz dealership in retaliation for the deaths of three Red Army Faction members in Stammheim prison in West Germany. On March 21, 1978, Janine Bertram, John, and Therese Coupez were arrested at a Tacoma hamburger chain just before executing another robbery. John was sentenced to 20 years in prison, though he would escape once in 1979 to be re-arrested after 2 years on the run.

Leonard Peltier — a Native American political prisoner serving two consecutive life sentences for a crime he was set up for—the killing of two FBI agents. In the early 1970s, Native Americans on the Pine Ridge Reservation were assaulted and murdered by a group of vigilantes and looked towards the American Indian Movement (AIM) for help. Hundreds of AIM members occupied the village of Wounded Knee in Pine Ridge in 1973, demanding an end to the U.S.-backed murder and intimidation of AIM supporters on the reservation and that the treaties signed by the U.S. be honored that gave the Lakota people the right to self-rule the land surrounding the Black Hills. Federal authorities surrounded the occupation with an army of over 300. The Indians refused to back down. They used weapons to defend themselves and held off the government forces for 73 days. After the siege, Leonard came to Pine Ridge with a few other AIM members in 1975 and set up camp in the village of Oglala to protect the village from vigilantes. On July 26, 1975 two FBI agents drove into the property unannounced and unidentified, and a firefight erupted, leaving the two FBI agents and one AIM member dead, while scores of FBI agents and U.S. Marshals surrounded the property. It’s believed that the attack against the AIM activists was an attempt to create a diversion for a secret agreement to transfer parts of the Pine Ridge Reservation to the federal government. With fabricated evidence and preventing Leonard from claiming self-defense, Leonard was convicted to two life sentences in federal prison. The struggle for Leonard’s freedom finally won, and Leonard’s life sentence was commuted to home confinement beginning on February 18, 2025. Leonard wrote the book *Prison Writings: My Life Is My Sun Dance.*

bo brown — bo was a revolutionary and member of the George Jackson Brigade. bo was a working class butch lesbian in the Seattle area when un 1971 she got busted for stealing from her boss and did 7 months of a one year and one day sentence in Terminal Island federal penitentiary, where she learned a whole lot about racism, queer hating, mean police, junkies and other such facts of life. After her release, bo got involved with the political lesbian and prison struggles on the streets. bo worked on lots of different projects with children, womyn, men, and 3rd World peoples but prison work was always the most important in her life. According to a short autobiography, “I heard a lot of folks in a lot of places talk about the revolution, but nobody did anything except talk. The BLA and Assata were working their asses off but nobody in Seattle did a thing. Then the SLA stormed over the ruling class’s toes and met a fiery death; still nobody did anything. Then the GJB started happening right under our very noses—it made sense to me that you just can’t talk rockefeller et al. into giving up what they have stolen from the people. I knew it was time for me to put my words into action.” bo was known as the “gentleman bank robber,” because she would case and rob banks in drag. bo was captured on November 3, 1977, while casing a bank in North Seattle, and spent 8 years in federal prison, notably along with Assata Shakur and Lolita Lebron. After her release, bo became committed to prison abolition struggles, becoming a founding mother of Out of Control: Lesbian Committee to Support Women Political Prisoners and also working regularly with the All of Us or None as well as the Prison Activist Resource Center in Oakland, California where she lived. bo passed away on October 24, 2021. A documentary about her life, *The Gentleman Bank Robber: The Story of Butch Lesbian Freedom Fighter rita bo brown*, was released in 2017.

independentistas — Puerto Rican revolutionaries who fight for the decolonization of Puerto Rico. One of the main independentista groups was the

Armed Forces of Puerto Rican National Liberation—a Puerto Rican clandestine guerrilla organization that, through direct action, struggled for a Puerto Rico independent of US colonization. The FALN was founded in the 1960s and was one of several organizations established during that decade that promoted clandestine armed struggles against the colonial forces of the United States. The FALN was founded following decades of persecution by the FBI, including illegal imprisonments and assassination against members of the Puerto Rican independence movement. Throughout their actions, the FALN would struggle for the freedom of political prisoners from the previous generation of independenistas. In 1999 the sentences for 16 captured FALN political prisoners were commuted by Bill Clinton. El Ejército Popular Boricua / Los Macheteros would succeed the FALN in the armed struggle.

AIM — an Indigenous liberation movement founded in Minneapolis, Minnesota in July 1968 to address police brutality, poverty, and violence and discrimination against Native communities. They organized for treaty rights, self-determination, and the reclamation of tribal land. AIM activists organized and advocated on behalf of Indigenous communities and in the early 1970s led provocative marches, such as Trail of Broken Treaties, and occupations like that of the abandoned federal penitentiary on Alcatraz Island organized by seven Indian movements, including the Indians of All Tribes, and the protests, occupation, and armed stand of at Wounded Knee on the Pine Ridge reservation. The group met fierce resistance from local and federal law enforcement agencies and COINTELPRO operations.

Tom Manning — an anti-imperialist revolutionary and member of the Sam Melville / Jonathan Jackson Unit, later known as the United Freedom Front (UFF), which conducted sabotage, expropriations, an attacks against profiteers and symbols of American imperialism in support of global anti-colonial struggles in the 1970s and 1980s. As a youth, Tom shined shoes, raised pigeons, and joined the military in 1963, where he was stationed at Guantanamo Bay and in Vietnam. Tom was sentenced to five years in prison for armed robbery and assault some time after 1965. Tom credits these years for his deep politicization through interactions with other prisoners. After going underground with his wife Carol as part of the UFF, Tom, Carol, Ray Luc Levasseur, Patricia Gross, Richard Williams, Jaan Laaman, and Barbara Curzi, who came to be known as the Ohio 7, were captured after the longest manhunt in New Jersey history. Tom was sentenced to 58 years in federal prison for his role in killing a police officer and the UFF bombings. Tom died in 2010 after more than 30 years in prison where he continued to struggle to the end. Tom's revolutionary artwork is featured prominently in the political prisoner writing and art collection *Hauling Up the Morning / Izando la Mañana: writings & art by political prisoners & prisoners of war in the U.S.*, edited by Ray Luc Levasseur and Tim Blunk, with an introduction by Assata Shakur, and also in the book *For Love and Liberty*.

Jaan Laaman — an anti-imperialist revolutionary and member of the Sam Melville / Jonathan Jackson Unit, later known as the United Freedom Front (UFF). Jaan was a college student SDS activist, and later he was imprisoned for a bombing of Nixon's re-election headquarters from 1972-1978. He was in Attica prison and learned from the leaders there, including Sam Melville, but he was released shortly before the uprising. He headed back to Boston and began to work with Kazi Toure, Richard Williams, and Barbara Curzi. They fought racism and made a historic concert for the South African struggle, the Amandla Concert. Jaan taught self-defense in the Amandla People's Security. Circumstances forced them into life underground. The Ohio 7 and Kazi Toure were accused by the government of 19 armed attacks on military bases, corporate head quarters, and South African representatives in the U.S. They believe that it is necessary to be able to attack U.S. imperialism on many levels—with force and clarity. Imprisoned with a 98 sentence, Jaan understood that captivity is just another aspect of the struggle. One of the many projects he worked on in prison was *4strugglemag*, a revolutionary anti-imperialist prisoner magazine to which he contributed his writings.

Bill Dunne & Larry Giddings — anti-authoritarian political prisoners imprisoned for an attempted 1979 prison break from King County Jail in Seattle. Bill and his former co-defendant, Larry, were accused by the police of being "members of a small, heavily armed group of revolutionaries" associated with the Wellspring Communion. Based primarily in San Francisco, Wellspring engaged in radical leftist political outreach, merging the ideas of communism and anarchism. Though active mainly in the Bay Area, the organization was said to have practiced guerrilla training in Humboldt County. The group—once known as Tribal Thumb—was according to media reports an offshoot of the Symbionese Liberation Army with membership having backgrounds in SDS, the Weather Underground, Black Panthers, Black LIberation Army, and other guerrilla groups, though none of this has ever been confirmed. Prior to their arrests, another accused member of Wellspring, Artie Ray Baker, was arrested for the murder of a border inspector. On October 14, 1979, seven prisoners including Baker escaped the high security jail after capturing the guards and taking over the jail's control room. Waiting for the escapees in cars were Bill and Larry. As escaped prisoners climbed into Bill's car, an officer opened fire, injuring Bill and killing one of the escapees, after which Bill crashed the car and was arrested. While the police were detaining those who fled after the crash, Larry approached, a gun battle ensued, and Larry and one officer were wounded. Larry was captured a little while later and received two life sentences. He was released in 2004. Bill is still imprisoned, though he has continued his political activities inside, including organizing prison magazines such as *Prison News Service.*

Assata Shakur — a Black revolutionary and a member of the Black Liberation Army (BLA) who escaped from prison and lives free as a maroon in Cuba. Assata became involved with Civil Rights protests while in community college in New

York City in the mid-1960s. After graduating from CCNY, she moved to Oakland, California, where she joined the Black Panther Party (BPP), working with the party to organize protests and community education programs. After returning to New York City, Assata led the BPP chapter in Harlem, coordinating the Free Breakfast for Children program, free clinics, and community outreach. Assata joined the BLA, an offshoot of the BPP whose members were inspired by Third World liberation struggles, engaging in guerilla warfare against the U.S. government for Black liberation. On May 2, 1973, Assata, along with Zayd Malik Shakur and Sundiata Acoli, were involved in a shootout with the police, during which Zayd was killed and Assata was wounded. After Assata's capture, between 1973 and 1977 she was indicted ten times, resulting in seven different criminal trials. On November 2, 1979, Assata, after six years of imprisonment (where she birthed her daughter, Kakuya Shakur), escaped the Clinton Correctional Facility for Women in New Jersey when three members of the Black Liberation Army visiting her drew concealed .45-caliber pistols and a stick of dynamite, seized two correction officers as hostages, commandeered a van and (with the assistance of members of the May 19 Communist Organization) made their escape. Despite one of the largest police and FBI manhunts in history, Assata made her way to Cuba, where she continues to reside today. Assata is the author of the books *Assata: An Autobiography* and many articles and poems.

Marilyn Buck — an anti-imperialist revolutionary who was imprisoned for her participation in the 1979 prison escape of Assata Shakur, the 1981 Brinks robbery, and the 1983 U.S. Senate bombing. Marilyn joined Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) during the height of activism against the Vietnam war while at the University of Texas. In 1967 she moved to Chicago where she edited the SDS newsletter New Left Notes, and incorporated Marxist feminism into the organization's politics. In San Francisco, she worked with Third World Newsreel, a media collective that showcased anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist struggles around the world. Convicted for purchasing ammunition for the Black Liberation Army in 1973, she was sentenced to 10 years in prison, furloughed in 1977, and went underground instead of returning to prison. After her capture and convictions in 1985, she was sentenced to 80 years in federal prison, where she wrote on women in prison, solitary confinement, political prisoner support, and revolutionary poetry. Marilyn passed away on August 3, 2010. Marilyn's selected poetry, *Inside/Out* was published in 2012.

Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin — a Black revolutionary anarchist. As a youth street gang member in the segregated South, Lorenzo joined the NAACP youth group when he was 12 and took part in the 1960 sit-in protests. After being drafted and serving two years in the US army (where he was a Vietnam anti-war organizer and was court-martialed), he joined the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in 1967 shortly before it temporarily merged with the more militant Black Panther Party (BPP). In the wake of the urban Black rebellions that rocked the U.S. after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King in the spring of 1968, an attempt was made to frame Ervin on weapons charges and for planning to kill a local Klan leader. In order to escape prosecution in these charges Ervin hijacked a plane to Cuba in February 1969. It was while in Cuba and later in the then-Republic of Czechoslovakia, that he first became disillusioned with state socialism, recognizing it as dictatorship period, not the "dictatorship of the proletariat" as various Communist governments claimed. In Prague (the Czechoslovak capital), Ervin was betrayed to U.S. officials by pro-CIA elements left over from the Dubcek regime shortly after the Soviet invasion of the country. Briefly captured and held at the American Consulate, he fled to East Berlin where he was kidnapped by a special team of by American and West German special agents sent to recapture him. He was drugged and tortured during interrogation in the basement of the U.S. Consulate for almost a week, and after almost dying from this mistreatment, he was illegally brought back to the U.S. where it was falsely announced by the State department and the FBI in a press conference that he had "turned himself in" at JFK airport. After a farce of a trial in a small town in Georgia, where he faced the death penalty before an all-white judge, jury, prosecutor and defense attorneys (appointed by the court), he was sentenced to the rest of his life in prison. Ervin remained politically active in prison where he was first introduced to the ideals of anarchism in the late 1970s. He read many books on the subject sent by prison book clubs, and the Anarchist Black Cross, an international prisoner support movement, adopted his case. Also in prison, Ervin wrote several Anarchist pamphlets that are probably the most widely read writings on anarchism and the Black liberation movement. *Anarchism and the Black Revolution* is still popular, and has gone through several printings. He was also involved in many prison struggles, the early 1970s prison union organizing campaigns and the Black prisoner movement or that period. Because of years of solitary confinement and prison mail censorship, his case was kept in obscurity, and it was not until he was one of the "Marion Brothers," a group of prisoners who became well known as they struggled against the first Control Unit at Marion Federal Penitentiary, that his case became a public concern. Ervin's own legal challenges and an international campaign eventually led to his release from prison after 15 years of incarceration.

Standing Deer — an anarchist Chocktaw and Oneida Indigenous revolutionary and political prisoner. Standing Deer was born in Oklahoma in 1923.The son of an Oneida mother from Wisconsin and Choctaw father from southwestern Oklahoma, he learned to speak both Choctaw and Oneida, the languages spoken by his paternal and maternal grandmothers, respectively, before he spoke English. As a young adult, Standing Deer was arrested several times for a number of minor offenses and received his first prison sentence in 1963: ten years for interstate trafficking of counterfeit money. After his release in 1970, he was sentenced to another twenty-five years in the state penitentiary in Oklahoma for armed robbery and larceny involving the theft of an automobile. During that sentence, he spent a year in solitary confinement for his

involvement in a prison riot on July 27, 1973. He escaped on April 29, 1975, when he hijacked a bus transporting him to another prison and remained underground until police apprehended him in Chicago on April 6, 1976. After his arrest in Chicago, Wilson faced indictments on seven felony charges, facing up to seven life sentences. Standing Deer was sent to the U.S. Penitentiary super-maximum-security prison in Marion, Illinois. While in the Marion prison, Wilson suffered from degenerative disc disease, high blood pressure, and diabetes. On May 17, 1978, according to Standing Deer's account, chief correctional officer Carey entered his hospital room with a well-dressed white man who claimed that he could obtain medical treatment and parole for Wilson if he would help "neutralize" Leonard Peltier: Standing Deer would befriend Peltier through the prison's Native American cultural group, convince Peltier that he had the means and materials to help him escape from prison, then prison officials would kill Leonard Peltier during the escape attempt. Standing Deer agreed to his role in the plan after which Oklahoma authorities dropped the warrants that they held on him and on June 1, they cancelled the pending trial and released him from the hospital. In Coming Home, an excerpt from a public message that he wrote in 1994, Standing Deer relayed the significance of meeting Peltier: "[That] transformed my life, brought me home to my People, and put me dead in the middle of the political struggle for the survival of my People." He describes the events of that and the following day as a spiritual and political cleansing and transformation. As he approached Peltier that day, he could sense the love, respect, and commitment Peltier radiated and recognized his scars as piercings and flesh offerings from the Sun Dance (a sacred Lakota ceremony outlawed by U.S. institutions such as the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Bureau of Prisons). Standing Deer confessed his role in the government plot to assassinate Peltier, and became an active and outspoken advocate for prisoners and political prisoners, in particular for their religious, physical, medical, and intellectual and educational rights. In 1984, Standing Deer, Leonard Peltier, and Albert Gaza fasted for 42 days to draw attention to the deplorable conditions at FCI Marion.

Linda Evans — an anti-imperialist political prisoner for 16 years, and before her imprisonment she was involved in many organizations, including Students for a Democratic Society, the Weather Underground, and the May 19th Communist Organization. She was captured in 1985 and convicted for her part in the Resistance Conspiracy Case. Her sentence was commuted by outgoing president Bill Clinton in 2001. Linda was imprisoned at various jails, including the DC jail and FCI Dublin. Since her release, she has co-founded All of Us or None, a grassroots civil rights organization of formerly incarcerated people and their families, and she works tirelessly with California Coalition for Women Prisoners, the Drop LWOP Coalition, the Immigrant Defense Taskforce of North Bay Organizing Project in Santa Rosa, and the successful campaign to free Dr. Mutulu Shakur. Along with her partner Eve Goldberg, Linda wrote *The Prison-Industrial Complex and the Global Economy*.

Laura Whitehorn — served almost 15 years in high security federal prisons for her involvement in the anti-imperialist armed actions that culminated in the Resistance Conspiracy Case of the mid-1980s. She served time at the Baltimore City Jail, the DC jail, FCI Lexington, FCI Alderson, FCI Dublin (then called Pleasanton), and the high security unit in Marianna, Florida. Laura was involved in anti-imperialist organizations including the Weather Underground Organization (WUO) and the May 19th Communist Organization, and rights and AIDS support groups. Since her release at the turn of the century, she has been involved in a number of causes including campaigns to free political prisoners and is a cofounder of Release Aging People in Prison (RAPP), a community based organization founded and led by formerly incarcerated people and family members. Laura edited and wrote the introduction for *The War Before: The True Life Story of Becoming a Black Panther*, *Keeping the Faith in Prison and Fighting for Those Left Behind* and wrote the introduction to Victoria Law's *Resistance Behind Bars: The Struggles of Incarcerated Women*. She and her partner, the writer Susie Day, participated in a prison, labor, and academic delegation to Palestine in 2016.

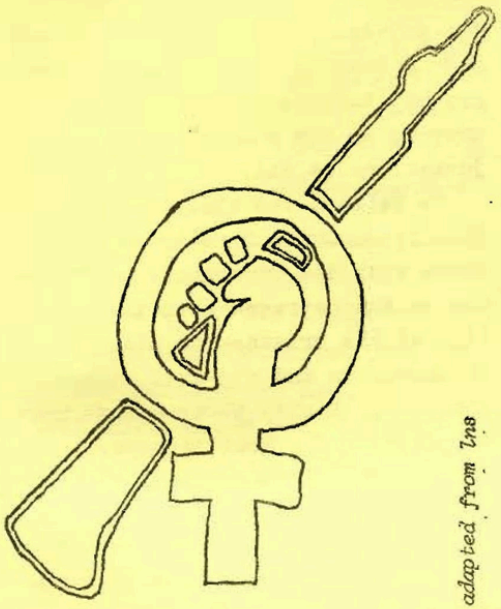
Attica Brothers — the Attica Rebellion was a September 9, 1971 rebellion by thousands of prisoners at the New York state prison. Answering George Jackson's call in his writings for prisoners to take a revolutionary role, prisoners at Attica organized around a list of 27 demands regarding improvements in living conditions that were left unanswered. Many prisoners, like Joseph Little, who told a government panel, "I'm not for no penitentiary reform. I'm for abolishing the whole concept of penitentiary reform," saw the prison as a site of revolutionary warfare. New York Governor Rockerfeller and President Nixon ordered hundreds of state troopers and prison guards to take back the prison with force, leaving 10 correctional officers and 29 prisoners dead by police fire. Many prisoners were assassinated after the siege for their organizing, like white revolutionary Sam Melville. On September 17, the Weather Underground launched a retaliatory attack on the New York Department of Corrections, exploding a bomb near the commissioner's office. The communiqué accompanying the attack called the prison system an example of "how a society run by white racists maintains its control," with white supremacy being the main question white people have to face." Survivors of the Attica rebellion were known as "Attica Brothers," especially those facing legal trouble in the aftermath.

Frank "Big Black" Smith — a Black revolutionary prisoner at Attica State Prison who, along with other prisoners, led a rebellion against the injustices of the prison system which remains one of the bloodiest civil rights confrontations in American history. After the riots, his participation in which led to his torture by officers, he kicked a drug addiction and worked as a substance abuse counselor. He also devoted his life to becoming the voice of his fellow prisoners in a 26-year lawsuit against New York state. Smith later became an advocate for the

Forgotten Victims of Attica, a group comprised of surviving hostages and relatives of the dead prison guards who were believed to have been encouraged to accept limited benefits which barred them from suing the state. Smith married in 1983, studied to be a paralegal, and worked as an investigator for lawyers. He passed away at 70 years old in Kingston, North Carolina, after a long battle with cancer. He is survived by his wife, Pearl. Ed Mead remembers bringing Big Black and Splitting the Sky into prisons to build political consciousness. "Around that time, the documentary about the Attica uprising, simply called Attica, was released. Using my NLG connections, we obtained a copy of the film, and over a period of time brought various Attica Brothers to Seattle for showings. We'd screen the film at places like the University of Washington, generally raising something in the neighborhood of fifteen hundred bucks for the Attica Brothers Legal Defense Fund in the process. I would help put these events on for the NLG, but while these comrades were in town I would also bring them into Monroe under the banner of the WPLU to show the documentary to the prisoners. For instance, we brought Big Black and Splitting the Sky in like this. After the showing, the comrades would answer the convicts' questions about the Attica uprising" (Ed Mead, *Lumpen*).

John "Splitting the Sky" Boncore — a Mohawk/Cree revolutionary prisoner at Attica state prison who also, along with other prisoners, led the Attica rebellion. Splitting the Sky grew up in poverty after his father died in a work accident and was removed from his mother's care and sent to foster care where he was physically abused and ended up homeless after fighting back against one of his oppressive foster parents. Sent to the juvenile reformatory center in Elmira for robbing a sub shop out of desperation and hunger after sleeping on the streets of New York City. In August 1971, the age of 19, he was transferred to Attica prison to serve the final months of his sentence. Splitting the Sky vividly remembers how the rebellion began, "We came to a stop and there was maybe about eight guards there. Then there was this tall, black brother, who was a known Panther, he said to the captain, 'Why'd you lock them brothers up last night?' The captain said, 'I don't know fellas, but we'll look into it.' Then the brother said, 'You're fucking full of shit honkey!' and he punched him right in the mouth and knocked him down." "That's when Sam [Melville] came out from somewhere and kicked him in the side of the ribs. And that's when I turned around and yelled 'Take this motherfucking place now!' and it was just like a spark and a prairie fire." The few dozen prisoners in the corridor with Sam and John, including Richard X Clark, L. D. Barclay and Tommy Hicks, overpowered the guards and ripped down a gate separating them from their brothers in other blocks. Within minutes prisoners had control of most of the prison" (Leslie James Pickering, *Mad Bomber Melville*). After the brutal state repression of the rebellion, and despite a legal defense mounted by famed attorney William Kunstler, Splitting the Sky was convicted in 1975 by a jury of the murder of a prison guard, whom he denied attacking as was claimed, and was sentenced to 20 years to life in prison, but was granted clemency in 1976. Splitting the Sky later joined the American Indian Movement and participated in actions such as the the 31-day Gustafsen Lake Standoff by First Nations land claims activists in British Columbia.

Prison Legal News — *Prison Legal News* (PLN) is a monthly American magazine and online periodical published since May 1990, the longest running newspaper produced by and for current and former prisoners in U.S. history. It was started by revolutionary Ed Mead, a political prisoner imprisoned for his activities with the George Jackson Brigade, and extremely successful jailhouse lawyer. PLN has been involved in litigation concerning First Amendment and censorship issues in the prison and jail context since 1994. Co-editor Ed Mead was prevented from assisting in publishing *Prison Legal News* due to a condition of his parole prohibiting association with other felons—a policy specifically enacted to prevent him from further involvement with PLN.



adapted from Lna

We're not all white and we're not all men
said a white male member
of our collective
to a liberal masked media man

Why struggle with
arms, tools, commie Q's?
dykes niggers cons
when you could slip away with
left support action
or vague mass movement construction

I can love
I can slip into class, bitch privilege
love don't mean unity with another
privilege doesn't change alienation
both mean slipping into darkness
alienation is masses of couples buying
coca cola and grapes at safeway
and owning own stereos t.v.'s and cribs

Just like slumlords pimps I.T.T.

organized us
We will dis organize
learn struggle and skills
move ment action new ways

Not the vague vanguard
We are a collection
of oppressed people turning
inside out with action
this united few breaks
barriers of
race class sex
workers and lumpen
all going together
combatting dull sameness
corporations, government
and the established rule of
straight white cocks

I cannot be one
acting alone with my
little toe outside the line
its both feet
whole body
ain't no turning back now
no more mass meetings stale mating
action

Loving learning laboring
with a few comrades
oh won't you harbor me?
joining you sistah brother
is freedom, Sue, Assata
George, Jill, Martin
new family being sane
small, not like charlie's
leader ship

We are cozy cuddly
armed and dangerous
and we will
raze the fucking prisons
to the ground /GEORGE JACKSON
BRIGADE

a poem from the communique released by the George Jackson Brigade on International Women's Day claiming responsibility for breaking their comrade John Sherman out of police custody, shared in the underground guerrilla paper *Dragon,* No. 8, April 1976, published by the Bay Area Research Collective

Support Political Prisoners

As you've heard & read, it is vital that we support the political prisoners of our liberation movements. Providing support builds bridges across and through prison bars, giving those locked inside a connection to the outside world. Your support matters.

Get involved. Write to a political prisoner—a simple letter provides a needed escape. Visit them in prison. Ask what a political prisoner needs and do what you can to help them. Offer them support.

Visit the NYC Anarchist Black Cross website (*nycabc.wordpress.com*) and learn more about those currently imprisoned for political reasons.

Buy a Certain Days: Freedom for Political Prisoners calendar (*certaindays.org*).

Visit your local Books Through Bars group and send books to those incarcerated (*booksthroughbarsnyc.org/resources*).

Join your nearest Anarchist Black Cross group (*abcf.net*).

Visit *rattlingthecages.com* to learn more.

Write to Political Prisoners mentioned in this conversation

for a monthly updated list of political prisoners & their addresses visit

nycabc.wordpress.com

1) Political Prisoners, Mass Incarceration, & Abolition
Eric King, Herman Bell, David Gilbert, Susan Rosenberg

2). Continuing the Struggle Inside & Out
Eric King, Ashanti Alston, Ray Luc Levasseur

3) Antifascism Behind Bars
Eric King and David Campbell

4) Black August & Prisoner Support
Eric King, dequi kioni-sadiki, Harold Taylor

5) Eric King in Conversation with James Kilgore
Eric King, James Kilgore

6) Post-Prison Activism & Archiving Resistance
Eric King, Jake Conroy, Claude Marks

all conversations are available @FirestormCoop on youtube

Rattling the Cages

7) Until All Are Free
Eric King, Jason Hammond, Jeremy Hammond

8) Revolutionary Women Behind Bars
Eric King, Linda Evans, Laura Whitehorn, Nicole Kissane

9) Becoming Politicized in Prison
Eric King, Josh Davidson, Hector Rodriguez, Farhan Ahmed

10) Rattling the Cages: How We Dit It & How You Can Too
Eric King, Sara Falconer, Josh Davidson

11) Abolition Is a Family Affair
Eric King, Sharon Shoatz, susie day, Rochell Bricker

12) Looking Back at the George Jackson Brigade
Mark Cook, Janine Bertram, Eric King

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